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Climate change beneath our feet

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The Met Office has joined a water research team in a joint venture, commissioned by UK Water Industry Research (UKWIR), to predict the effect of climate change on sewers and sewer design.

The research team will be made up of experts from HR Wallingford (Hydrological Research), the Met Office, Imperial College London and Montgomery Watson, an engineering consultancy.

The three-year contract will look at rainfall predictions for the future. Climate model outputs from the Met Office's Hadley Centre will be used to evaluate the implications for sewer design and operation.

During the first year, the Met Office will focus specifically on providing information relating to seasonal rainfall changes in depth and intensity across the country projected over the next 80 years.

Richard Kellagher, principal engineer at HR Wallingford is overseeing the joint venture. He explains, "It is essential that we develop sewer design criteria based on anticipated future conditions so that adequate levels of service can be provided. The joint initiative comes as a result of water company concerns to meet their regulatory and legislative responsibilities and satisfy public expectations. They are very aware of the potential problems that the changing climate may cause them in dealing with increasing rainfall and they need to be able to evaluate this.

Murray Dale, project manager for the Met Office, added, "This does not just mean excessive rainfall. Lengthy dry periods can also affect water quality in rivers. The Met Office was pleased to be awarded the contract by UKWIR and we are sure that our data will be used successfully to make a significant difference to the UK's sewerage design standards."

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